

## *Wisconsin Folks: Masters of Tradition*



Coleen Bins, born in 1961 in Green Bay, is a member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, part of the Iroquois Confederacy. Skilled in several traditional art forms, Coleen specializes in silver work. After being introduced to Iroquois brooches by her Aunt Grace, she studied at the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico where she learned about traditional *ukwehu'we* sterling silver brooches, and then studied in upstate New York, the homeland of the Oneida people.

“Another important part of my education was meeting other artists and elders in the homelands who taught me about the cultural history and spiritual significance of our design and art. Each design has meaning to our culture and our own personal expression. It is important to learn these meanings as it explains how we are ALL connected to ALL of creation.”

Coleen uses sterling silver, nickel, copper and brass to make her pieces which include brooches and earrings decorated with imagery important in Oneida culture: strawberries, turtles, sky dome.

Coleen's apprentice was Gabrielle Metoxen, a young woman from Oneida. Coleen would come down from her store in Egg Harbor, Chief Oshkosh Native American Arts, to meet her at the Oneida Nation Arts Program's silver workshop which has a polishing machine. Gabrielle learned how to create her own designs, cut the metal sheets to avoid waste, and polish. She also learned the discipline of the work and that it demands a lot of time and energy.

Gabrielle wrote, “I learned that the brooches were adopted from European tradition, particularly Scotland. I liked that fact because I also come from a European ancestry. It made me feel more connected to both my cultures.”

For Coleen, “This apprenticeship reinforced why I do what I do. I love my culture, craft, and art. This experience rekindled my passion for my work.”

*“Art is not just a fleeting moment of the present but a connection to the past and future.” Coleen Bins*